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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the teaching of a career development course in college. The stated goals of the course are to increase students' knowledge about themselves, about postgraduate educational and occupational opportunities, and about job entry skills. The mechanics of the course are described, including its length, format, written assignments, videotape programs and booklets, career inventories, out-of-class skill development tasks and grading. The course content is described, noting use of paper and pencil exercises; small group in-class discussion; use of career inventories; graduate education, including graduate study in psychology; world of work; decision-making; job search skills and resume writing; and interviewing. Previous evaluations by students of the course are described. Students' comments are interspersed in the descriptions of course mechanics and course content. A list of selected readings for career development in psychology and a reference list of career information are included. (ABL)

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Advising in the Classroom:

Teaching a Career Development Course

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Abstract

This article describes a career development course for upper level psychology majors. After reporting on course mechanics, I elaborate on the course content, including how I attempt to increase students' knowledge (a) about themselves, (b) about post graduate educational and occupational opportunities, and (c) about job entry skills. A distinctive feature of this article is the report of students' reactions to each of the major components of the course, illustrating the course's effectiveness using anecdotal information. Finally, I summarize the results of four formal evaluative studies that I have conducted. A major recommendation consists of increasing the emphasis on teaching decision-making skills.

Advising in the Classroom:

Teaching a Career Development Course

As an introduction to describing the course, I want to summarize briefly some of the literature about career development courses. By the mid-1970s, one study (Haney & Howland, 1978) revealed that 63% of those two- and four-year colleges that responded to a survey offered career courses for credit. The results of a literature review that I conducted in the spring of 1991 identified 27 published studies describing and/or evaluating credit earning career courses. The references for this presentation do not include those studies, but I will provide a list of those references to individuals requesting it.

Among the more than two dozen articles describing and/or evaluating career courses are three that I published from the late 1970s through the mid 1980s (Ware, 1985; Ware, 1981, and Ware & Beischel, 1979). One purpose of this description and report is to illustrate what teachers of psychology can do to promote their students' career development.

Three of the goals of the course that I teach include increasing students' knowledge (a) about themselves, (b) about post graduate educational and occupational opportunities, and (c) about job entry skills. Initially, I will describe some of the mechanics of the course. Following that, I will elaborate on the three content areas of the course and summarize the results of my evaluative research about the course's effectiveness.

Course Mechanics

The class meets for 50 minutes, three times a week for one semester. I employ traditional lecture format, small group discussion, written assignments,

locally and commercially produced videotape programs and booklets, career inventories, and out-of-class skill development tasks. This multi-dimensional approach to the course highlights my effort to engage students in as many ways as possible and illustrates what some refer to as active learning.

Printed materials include books by Figler (1988) and Super and Super (1982), and booklets about career development and graduate school that I produced (Ware, 1987; Ware, 1990a). I have also compiled several published articles and placed them on the reserve shelf in the library. Table 1 lists those articles.

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There are some additional reference materials that you might want to examine. A book by Woods with Wilkinson (1987) contains many useful readings for undergraduates. Teachers and advisers may also find instructive the contents of books by Ware and Millard (1987) and Woods (1988).

You might wonder how I assign grades in this type of course. Performance on paper and pencil exercises and career inventories contribute 45% and three essays contribute 21% to the final grade. I evaluate students' performance on the preceding items using a scale from not completed (0) to superior (5). Weekly, short answer essays covering reading assignments constitute 30% of the grade. I assign class attendance and participation a weight of 4%.

That concludes a description of some of the course mechanics. I will describe that part of the course content called, knowledge about self.

Course Content

Knowledge About Self

Several structured, paper and pencil exercises guide students to explore, identify, and clarify their interests, values, and abilities. For example, in one exercise, students select from among more than two dozen values those that are important to them. From among the values that they check, students select those that were most important to them and those that were most likely to be related to the work that they would do some day. In another exercise, students describe 10 of their achievements; subsequently they identify the underlying abilities that were necessary to produce the achievements. Figler (1975) provides excellent illustrations of the types of exercise instructors can use. Students complete exercises outside of class. Small group, in-class discussion of the results of the exercises fosters student disclosure, peer support, and feedback.

The following excerpts reflect students' reactions to the paper and pencil exercises. The quotations that I cite came from narrative evaluations that students completed at the end of each semester during the last decade.

"I found a few of the activities 'silly' at the time, but now I see the value of them. These activities forced me to interact with people I didn't know. And this is the part of [a job] interview that an individual must become comfortable with."

"The first section of the course . . . was beneficial for me since it provided an opportunity to evaluate myself and my perception of myself. . . . The exercises provided me with a chance to learn how to talk about myself without feeling guilty or embarrassed about it."

"I learned about transferable skills. There are things I do every day that I can apply to the world of work. It was important to me to find this out because now I think that I have a lot more to offer a prospective employer than I realized."

Students complete career inventories during the first and second half of the semester. I use the Self-Directed Search (SDS) (Holland, 1990) and the Career Decision-Making System (CDMS) (Harrington & O'Shea, 1982). Intuition suggested that some students might find one type of inventory of greater heuristic value than another. Conversations with students has confirmed my hunch.

The administration and interpretation of the two career inventories stimulates students' identification of their personal characteristics and of occupational alternatives of persons who have similar personal profiles. An advantage of these inventories is that they are largely self-administered, scored, and interpreted. However I repeatedly emphasize that the inventories are tools to promote exploration of alternatives not to dictate students' occupational choices (i.e., the inventories are not designed to tell them what to do).

The following excerpts reflect students' reactions to the inventories.

"I realized that these inventories do not make my decision for me, but instead inform me of the possibilities of jobs that my interests reflect. They also bring out in the open other types of employment that I may have overlooked. What it all comes down to is that you get to make the final decision for your future, but the inventories open a few more doors for you to investigate."

"Overall, taking both the SDS and the CDMS accomplished two things for me. First, taking both tests gave me some direction as to where my interests lie and put them into more concrete terms. Second, the tests gave me some general ideas

and fields that I may look in to for matching my abilities and values to a specific career."

"The SDS and CDMS inventories allowed me to think about and analyze a variety of jobs. After reviewing the jobs, I found that the management cluster had the most number of jobs that interested me."

Graduate Education and the World of Work

In the second stage of the course, I emphasize increasing students' knowledge about graduate education and the world of work. Exploration of graduate and professional school opportunities focuses on post-graduate work in psychology and related disciplines and the professions of medicine, dentistry, and law. During the semester, invited speakers describe their work activities, graduate preparation, and career satisfactions and dissatisfactions. Speakers include doctoral level psychologists and an attorney.

I spend four classes on graduate study in psychology. I lecture on the topics of deciding on, searching for, preparing for, and applying to graduate school. I also point out how the principles associated with each of those processes is transferable to pursuing professional school. I also spend about half a class describing masters and doctoral alternatives to graduate study in psychology, such as college student personnel, social work, rehabilitation counseling, physical therapy, occupational therapy, hospital administration, consumer research/marking, and special education.

A 15-page booklet, Pursuing Graduate Study in Psychology (Ware, 1990a), that I produced with desktop publishing software, elaborates on several of the issues in the lectures. In addition, the booklet describes several specialties in psychology,

lists the graduate schools and specialties that Creighton psychology alumni pursued, and discusses salient issues about the GRE and MAT.

A videotape that I produced, Pursuing Graduate Study in Psychology, (Ware & Sroufe, 1984b) also highlights factors associated with preparing one's self for graduate school. This tape contains excerpts from interviews with faculty, students, and a graduate school dean. The tape describes the role of personal motivation, research experience, course work, and field experience for gaining admission to graduate school.

The following excerpts reflect students' reactions to information about pursuing graduate or professional education.

"At the beginning of the semester, I anticipated pursuing a graduate degree in clinical psychology. However from what I have learned, I realized that it is not clinical psychology that I want to pursue, but rather counseling psychology. Discovering this distinction is in itself a step in furthering my career."

"My attitude toward postgraduate education on the whole has only been more firmly established . My desire for a postgraduate degree has altered from a shaky possibility of attending medical school to a firm commitment to this goal."

"Graduate school has been a definite possibility in my life. My self evaluation, however, tells me that I'm simply not a professional student. I am fully capable of performing well in graduate school, but it is not something I get a kick out of."

After completing the SDS, students select three occupations and use occupational reference materials, including the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) (U.S. Department of Labor, 1977) and the Occupational Outlook Handbook

1990-91 (OOH) (U.S. Department of Labor, 1990). Students conduct in-depth investigations of and write structured reports about those three occupations. Reports include information about what persons in those occupations do, training requirements, employment prospects, and the like. Following completion of the CDMS, students repeat this assignment using three different occupations.

Subsequently, students choose two from among the six previously identified occupations for conducting structured interviews with persons currently working in those positions. The interview includes questions about the specific duties performed, the degree of stress associated with the position, major satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and so forth. Students write summary reports about each interview and send thank you notes to the persons they interviewed. The practice of writing thank you notes gives students practice in etiquette associated with the employment interview that I cover later in the course.

Ordinarily, students may not conduct interviews with individuals whom they know nor with individuals on Creighton's campus. To prepare students for those interviews, I spend one class period describing techniques for identifying prospects, making contacts, scheduling appointments, and preparing for and conducting interviews. I emphasize making appointments for interviews two weeks before the reports' deadline. The biggest obstacle to completing the report on time occurs among students who fail to plan ahead.

To date, all students have been able to find persons working in their fields of interest. And virtually all persons whom students have contacted have been very supportive.

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The following excerpts reflect students' reactions to the DOT, OOH, and interviews with individuals who are working in occupations that interested them.

"Just a few weeks ago I was oblivious to the fact that reference guides such as the OOH and DOT existed. Such references have proved to be invaluable resources to me after completing the SDS and CDMS."

"The main idea that I got from these exercises is that there are many areas in the job world that I might really enjoy, but had just never given them much thought. These exercises just go to show that we don't always know what we are going to like or dislike until we do a little research."

"The interview was interesting because I could see how people were applying their abilities and values in the real world. They could tell us things that you can't learn about in books."

Two lectures during this second part of the course concentrate on career pursuits of Creighton and other alumni. In addition, I describe prospective social services employers in Omaha and many other communities by identifying the numerous agencies funded by United Way, such as the American Cancer Society, American Red Cross, Boys Clubs of Omaha, Inc., Child Savings Institute, Salvation Army, YMCA, and YWCA.

In addition, I give an in-depth description of the programs by one national, independent social services agency, called Family Service. Their programs include chemical dependency services, child care, community development, counseling services, family life education, and youth services. Finally, I describe the opportunities available with the Nebraska Department of Social Services, such as Aid to Dependent Children, Refugee Resettlement, Job Support, Food Distribution

Program, Medicaid, Child Protective Services, Domestic Abuse Program, and Adult Protective Services.

I also report national data on the number of jobs and salaries offered to psychology majors (College Placement Council, Inc., 1991, September). For example, findings indicate that the greatest numbers of employment offers were in management training (19%), sales (17%), and counseling (18%). Annual salary offers ranged from about $12,000 to $36,000 with a median offer of over $21,000.

A videotape that I produced called, Career Development and Opportunities for Psychology Majors, (Ware & Sroufe, 1984a) summarizes the first two components of the course. The narrator points out that psychology majors come from a variety of backgrounds and that they select psychology as a major because it may satisfy one or more personal interests and values. Interviews with four students document those conclusions.

The narrator describes the similarities between deciding about a college major and deciding about an occupation. In addition, he states that assessing and developing one's skills are integral conditions for career development. Excerpts from interviews with six psychology alumni include those who have gone immediately into the job market in business, human services, and collegiate settings, and those who have gone to graduate school in psychology or professional school in medicine and law. The contents of the interviews illustrate the general and specific skills that various occupational pursuits require and the variety of career paths available to psychology majors. The program concludes with a summary of the major issues in the program and an invitation to students to make use of their academic advisers and/or the variety of other campus resources. The

20-page booklet that I produced, also called (Ware, 1987), Career Development and Opportunities for Psychology Majors, elaborates on issues in the videotape. The booklet also lists suggested courses for students planning employment in business or human/social services settings and describes three components of the job search, including making contacts, preparing resumes, and undertaking interviews.

The following excerpts reflect students' reactions to the part of the course that emphasizes the opportunities in the world of work for psychology majors.

"The thing that struck me was that with a degree, a person can choose from a variety of jobs. By giving specific examples of psychology alumni you made the issue of jobs realistic. You not only gave us the good success stories, but also mentioned the hard work and sacrifices it took to get there."

"I was surprised at the salary range and number of opportunities that were listed in the salary survey. This information was very encouraging because I know that there are jobs available to me. Heretofore, I had believed the myth that a bachelor's degree in psychology was almost useless without a higher degree. I am no longer so closed-minded on this issue."

"My attitudes about employment have changed significantly. I used to think of employment and a career as a permanent thing that would be decided once and for all. Of course, this is not the case, and I will never consider any job or career to be what I will be doing for the rest of my life."

Job Entry Skills

I designed the last component of the course to develop job entry skills; this component requires about one-third of the semester. Lectures and activities focus

on developing skills in decision-making, job search skills, resume writing, and interviewing.

Currently, I devote two classes to decision-making. I use a videotape that presents a simulation in which a student is confronted with making a decision about selecting classes and a career. After introducing the situation, I subdivide the class into small groups and have them role play as advisers, trying to help the fictional student. Invariably members of the class offer solutions before identifying the problem; they emphasize the product versus the process of decision-making. The objective of the exercise is for students to discover and use the decision-making skills depicted in the video, including determining values, gathering information, and planning strategies.

I devote almost four classes to describing job search skills. In my introduction to this part of the course, I emphasize that an effective job search can employ a system of time-proven, investigative techniques to enhance the likelihood of acquiring the first and subsequent jobs. The principle steps in the job search consist of (a) setting realistic and lucid goals, (b) establishing a time line, (c) gathering information about prospective employers through formal and informal means, (d) evaluating and implementing plans (i.e., direct mail, placement bureaus, job fairs, classified ads, etc.), and (e) identifying survival jobs, including house cleaner, security guard, wait person, bartender, cab driver, house painter, and the like. I point out that the goals of survival jobs include providing income for food and shelter while permitting students to pursue positions that are consistent with their career goals.

In the final part of the course, all students submit a formal resume, and they may participate in a simulated job interview. Formal, written feedback gives students an evaluation of their resumes and interview performance. Students must submit original and revised copies of the resumes. The university's director of career planning visits the class and describes his office's materials and services with particular attention to procedures and expectations associated with employers' on-campus interviews.

The following excerpts reflect students' reactions to the last part of the course.

"Probably one of the most valuable skills that I have learned over the semester is how to plan a systematic, independent job search. The step of gathering information was probably my weakest skill because I would never know where to look besides the want ads. There were printed materials that I overlooked such as the phone book, the alumni newsletter, trade and business publications, and the College Placement Annual. I also overlooked various services such as the career planning office on campus."

"I have acquired skills in writing a resume. At the beginning of the semester when I learned that I would have to write a resume for the course, I was close to terrified. I did not believe that I had any transferable skills to put on a resume. Putting down the skills on the resume was not easy on the first several attempts, but each revision has facilitated the process, and I expect this to continue as I write more resumes."

"What has changed for me is that I now realize that there are many jobs out there; it is just a matter of me searching them out. Hopefully, I will never say that I cannot find a job."

Reflection on students' comments revealed at least six themes that recur during the course. They are (a) identifying one's interests, skills, aptitudes, and values, (b) discovering one's transferable skills, (c) recognizing career options/alternatives, (d) striving for a match between one's self and the world of work, (e) acquiring a life span or developmental perspective, and (f) acquiring job entry skills. However some of you may wonder about the results from more formal kinds of evaluation of the course. In other words, what quantitative evidence exists for the course's effectiveness.

Formal Evaluation

I wrote a chapter (Ware, 1988), "Teaching and Evaluating a Career Development Course for Psychology Majors," for Woods' book (1988). That chapter summarized the results from four studies I produced from 1979 to 1985. Despite their methodological limitations, those studies are, to my knowledge, the most thorough evaluations of a career development course for psychology or other students. I will only highlight the findings in this presentation.

All four studies employed junior and senior psychology majors who either took or did not take the course. Results indicated that students taking the course reported significantly greater increases in (a) knowledge about themselves, the world of work, and job entry skills, (b) information seeking thoughts and behaviors, (c) career maturity, and (d) identity; they also reported decreases in (e) occupational information seeking and (f) occupational barriers.

What conclusions have I drawn from the findings of my research? I will quote one of the salient conclusions in that chapter.

> The findings of this research program demonstrate that students entering the course needed more than information about the world of work and job search skills. Restricting one's efforts to providing information about work and job skills may limit students' career development by failing to establish a foundation in interest, value, and ability exploration and clarification. (Ware, 1988, p. 72)

Another lesson I have learned from teaching the course, observing students' career-related behaviors outside the classroom, and from research during the last two years is the need for significantly greater attention to developing decision-making skills. Moreover, the application of those skills is not limited to career decision-making, but they can also be used for a variety of applications from deciding how to spend spring vacation to choosing a research problem or selecting a mate. I believe that developing students' decision-making skills is one of the most important endeavors we can pursue to improve the quality of advising.

Table 1

Selected Readings for Career Development in Psychology

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